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## V. — On the Virgilian Catalepton II

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Corinthiorum amator iste verborum,  
 Iste iste rhetor, namque quatenus totus  
 Thucydides, tyrannus Atticae febris :  
 Tau Gallicum, min et sphin ut male illisit,  
 Ita omnia ista verba miscuit fratri.

2 *om. codices Quintiliani* (VIII, 3, 27 *sqq.*) 3 bri(t)tan(n)us attice febres  
*codd. Quint.* 4 min(mi) et psin et (prosmet, prominet) *codd.* | enim et spin(e)  
 et *codd. Quint.* | ut *Wagner et Schenkl* | illisit *vel* illi sit *codd.* illisit *codd. Quint.*  
 elisit *Wagner.* 5 ita *vel* ista *codd.* ita *codd. Quint.*

THIS epigram in choliambic trimeters, which survives in the *Appendix Vergiliana* as the second poem of the *Catalepton*, still bristles with unsolved difficulties. Most of the recent editors, such as Ellis, Vollmer, and Birt, follow Bücheler (*Rh. Mus.* xxxviii [1883], 507 ff.) in regard to the main purpose of the writer, though they still disagree both as to readings to be accepted, and as to details of interpretation.<sup>1</sup> They believe, however, that the archaisms mentioned in the text are Greek, not Latin, and Bücheler's citation of the epigram of Herodicus, as given in Athenaeus, v, 222 a, would to most scholars seem conclusive on this point :

οἴσι μέμηλε  
 τὸ σφὶν καὶ σφῶιν καὶ τὸ μὴν ἤδὲ τὸ νῖν.

Somewhat more recently, however, Professor H. W. Garrod, (*Class. Quart.*, iv [1910], 123-125), advocates a different view. Quintilian, he says, "quotes this poem . . .

<sup>1</sup> Curcio, however, in his *Poeti Latini Minori*, II (Catania, 1905), p. 70, reads,

tau Gallicum, myn' et psin' ut male illisit,

taking *tau Gallicum* as coördinate with the preceding expressions, *tyrannus*, *Thucydides*, and *amator*, while *myn'* and *psin'* are strange combinations with *-ne*, and imply that Cimber, following the example of Lucilius and Accius, had treated in verse questions relating to the letters  $\mu$  and  $\psi$ . I have not considered it necessary to introduce into the discussion the curious variations found in the *Grammaticomastix* of Ausonius, in whose time the epigram was evidently unintelligible.

in order to illustrate the ‘*odiosa cura*’ with which certain Latin writers employ obsolete expressions.” Quintilian (VIII, 3, 24 ff.) commends Virgil, a writer *acerrimi iudicii*, for his use of graceful and appropriate language, but finds fault with those who employ such archaic words as *oppido*, *antegerio*, *autumo*, *aerumnae*, and others. Some old-fashioned words, like *nuncupare* and *fari*, are “sometimes used of necessity, and many others may be introduced boldly, but only if there is no obvious affectation in their use. Such affectation Virgil ridicules in striking fashion,” and in illustration Quintilian cites this epigram, adding the statement that the person assailed was Cimber, who had killed his brother, according to Cicero’s ambiguous phrase *Germanum Cimber occidit* (*Phil.* XI, 6, 14). It is in reference to this fact that in another passage Cicero calls Cimber *Philadelphus* (*Phil.* XIII, 12, 26). “From the passage as a whole,” says Garrod, “it ought to be clear that Quintilian is speaking throughout of *Latin* writers or speakers, and that the obsolete words of which he complains are throughout Latin words.” Garrod therefore finds in the text the Latin words *min*, *ipsun*, *em*, and reads verse 4 thus:

‘tau Gallicum’ ‘min’ ‘ipsun’ ‘em’ male elisit,

explaining *min* = *mihine*, *ipsun* = *ipsusne*, *em* (for the *e* or *et* of the Mss.) = *eum*. These are the strange words that Cimber mixed for his brother. But he also *elisit* “crushed them up,” and “elided” them, metrically, in a horrid manner, producing — aside from the syllable *taug-*, for which “we may perhaps postulate some unknown herb *tauga*[-um] — the potent mixture *allec*, *cumminum*, ἐψόν, αἶμ’, ἄλ[α].”

This extraordinary conclusion, which, though the strange words ridiculed are supposed to be Latin, must yet rest upon three Greek words and another quite unknown word, is, of course, absolutely unconvincing, and in regard to this aspect of the epigram we must still, I think, follow the clue given by Athenaeus. As a matter of fact, there is no reason why, in driving his argument home, Quintilian should not have cited an illustration from Greek sources. Later, in the same

chapter (59-60), when speaking of a fault to which Latin writers were prone, that of combining incongruities, mixing, for example, the old and the new, the grand and the mean, the poetical and the commonplace, he compares this practice with a possible hodge-podge of dialects in a Greek writer, Doric, Ionic, Aeolic and Attic; and again, in 84, as examples of *ἐμφασις*, where a word implies more than it actually states, he gives two illustrations, one from Virgil, and the other from Homer.

In the epigram before us, then, it is probable that the writer is satirizing certain Greek usages rather than Latin. The Cimber assailed, T. Annius Cimber, was, as Cicero tells us (*Phil.* xi, 6, 14), a son of Lysidicus, himself a Lysidicus (with a pun upon the word), *quoniam omnia iura dissolvit*. Cimber, therefore, was the son of a Greek, and was doubtless a freedman. In his upward career he became a Roman praetor (*Phil.* xiii, 12, 26), but he was also a rhetorician. We may suppose that he wrote in Greek, and was a representative of Greek rhetoric in Rome at a time when this was much in vogue. As such he affected an archaic tone. He delighted in Corinthian words, that is (though I think Garrod is right in supposing that Corinth is intended to suggest Medea's poisons), words smacking of antiquity, like the old Corinthian bronzes, so dear to connoisseurs of art, and his admirers spoke of him as a *totus Thucydides*, a perfect Thucydides.

As is well known, the great Greek historian wrote in the old Attic dialect, ἡ ἀρχαία Ἀτθίς, or the Attic of the fifth century B.C., and his vocabulary includes many old and poetic forms. "In the choice of words," says Dionysius (*de Thuc.* 24; *ad Ammaeum*, 2), "Thucydides often adopts figurative, obscure, archaic, and strange diction, in place of that which was common and familiar to the men of his day" (Roberts, *The Three Literary Letters*, 133). After enumerating some of the historian's characteristics, Dionysius continues: "The most obvious of these is the attempt to indicate as many things as possible in as few words as possible, to combine many ideas in one, and to leave the listener expecting

to hear something more. The consequence is that brevity becomes obscurity." In another chapter Dionysius gives some examples of Thucydidean "expressions which are obscure, archaic, and puzzling to ordinary people" (*ib.* 137). Elsewhere he remarks that "only a select few can comprehend the whole of Thucydides, and not even they without occasional help in the way of grammatical explanations" (*ib.* 47).

A writer so famous as Thucydides was sure to have his imitators. And yet, being difficult himself, he proved a very difficult model. Thus Dionysius says: οἱ δὲ Θουκυδίδην ζήλοῦν λέγοντες καὶ τὸ μὲν εὐτονον καὶ στερεὸν καὶ δεινὸν καὶ τὰ τοῦτοις ὅμοια χαλεπῶς ἐκλαμβάνοντες, τοὺς δὲ σολοικοφανεῖς σχηματισμοὺς καὶ τὸ ἀσαφὲς προχειρίζόμενοι, πάνν εὐχερῶς ἀν᾿ ἀλίσκοιντο ἐκ τούτου τοῦ παραγγέλματος (*de Dinarcho*, 8). In a similar vein Cicero writes: Ecce autem aliqui se Thucydidius esse profitentur, novum quoddam imperitorum et inauditum genus (*Or.* 9, 30); and again: Huius tamen nemo neque verborum neque sententiarum gravitatem imitatur; sed cum mutila quaedam et hiantia locuti sunt, quae vel sine magistro facere potuerunt, germanos se putant esse Thucydidas (*ib.* 32).

As Cimber's work has not survived, we cannot estimate his success or failure in imitating Thucydides. The epigrammatist, however, ridicules his use of the letter τ, and of the pronouns μὲν and σφί. The former is, of course, an Ionic form, while σφί belongs to tragedy. What was Cimber's peculiarity in the use of τ we can only conjecture. His pronunciation was probably faulty or provincial, and the epithet *Gallicum* may well refer to the name *Cimber* (cf. *Cimbri lingua Gallica latrones dicuntur*, Festus) and imply that not only was the man himself really a barbarian, but his speech betrayed his origin. So De Witt, in *A. J. P.* xxxiii (1912), 318. For Kaibel's explanation, see *Rh. Mus.* XLIV (1889), 316.

It is, however, the third verse upon which especially I hope to throw some light. Here the man who is a perfect Thucydides is on that account (*quatenus* is causal) a *tyrannus Atticae febris*. The word *febris* is commonly supposed

to mean an unhealthy passion, a mania, and, as qualified by *Attica*, a mania for an Attic style.

Now it is obvious that, whatever meaning we may attach to the epigram as a whole, we must suppose that the expression *Atticae febris* involves an allusion to the well-known controversy once waged in rhetorical circles in Rome over true and false Atticism. The epigrammatist doubtless accepts the opinion of Cicero, to whom the Atticism of Calvus and his followers was extravagant and unwholesome, a poor style to cultivate, especially when it took for its model such a difficult and obscure writer as Thucydides. I need not do more than remind my readers of such passages as the following :

a) . . . unde erat exortum genus Atticorum iis ipsis, qui id sequi se profitebantur, ignotum. — Cic. *Tusc.* II, 1, 3.

b) Atticum se, inquit, Calvus noster dici oratorem volebat ; inde erat ista exilitas quam ille de industria consequabatur. dicebat, inquam, ita ; sed et ipse errabat et alios etiam errare cogebat. — Id. *Brut.* 82, 284.

c) Thucydidem, inquit, imitatur. optime, si historiam scribere, non si causas dicere cogitatis. Thucydides enim rerum gestarum pronuntiator sincerus et grandis etiam fuit ; hoc forense concertatorium iudiciale non tractavit genus. — *Ib.* 83, 287.

As to the term *tyrannus*, that is less easily explained in this connection. According to Bücheler, “scuticas caedemque tyrannus sapit, severam scholae disciplinam unde inter Epicuri successores Apollodoro cognomen inditum putamus *κηποτυράννης*.” Birt very properly objects to this view that *κηποτύραννος*, as applied to the Epicurean Apollodorus, may denote a *scholae tyrannus*, but not a *febris tyrannus*. Birt therefore reconstructs the verse, displacing *tyrannus* in somewhat arbitrary fashion with *renatus*, and making *Attice febris* an appositional nominative — *Thucydides renatus, Attice febris*. Ribbeck, Baehrens, and others fall back upon the *Britannus* of Quintilian’s text, but as this would identify the *Britanni* with the *Cimbri*, and nothing is known of such an association, recent editors reject the reading. Garrod substitutes *pyraunus* (*πύραυνος*), “fire-lighter,” which appears as the title of plays by Alexis and other writers of comedy, and if con-

tures are in order, this one is as good as any other. We may, however, suppose that Cimber was a very dogmatic rhetorician, one of those arrogant, self-satisfied teachers of whom Cicero often speaks, and whose pupils had to repeat their rules in slavish fashion, as exemplified especially in the *de Partitione Oratoria*.<sup>2</sup>

But the words *tyrannus Atticae febris* admit of another interpretation, which ought to have been suggested long before this. We must remember that while the person assailed in the epigram is a rhetorician, and while his rhetorical principles are a subject of ridicule, yet the writer has a more important end in view. Cimber is attacked primarily, not so much because of his profession, as because of the foul crime of which he was accused. Has the reference to Thucydides any bearing upon this, the main purpose of the iambic satirist?

One of the most famous passages in Thucydides is his description of the plague which ravaged Attica in the early years of the Peloponnesian war (II, 47-54). This description was greatly admired in antiquity, and has often been eulogized by modern writers. It was largely reproduced by Lucretius (VI, 1138 ff.):

Haec ratio quondam morborum et mortifer aestus  
Finibus in Cecropis funestos reddidit agros  
Vastavitque vias, exhaustit civibus urbem,

and Lucretius in turn inspired Virgil's account in *Georg.* III, 478 ff. and Ovid's in *Met.* VII, 520 ff. Procopius, in his *Persica*, II, 22, is largely indebted to Thucydides, when describing the plague in Constantinople in the time of Justinian. In the *περὶ Ἑρμηνείας* Demetrius cites the opening words of Thucydides' chapter 48 (the real beginning of the description), as an example of the elevated (*μεγαλοπρεπής*) style, and Lucian, in his essay *On the Writing of History*, tells us of one Crepereius Calpurnianus of Pompeiopolis, who wrote a history of the war between Parthia and Rome, in the course of which he inflicted a plague on Nisibis, "lifting the whole

<sup>2</sup> For this suggestion, which could easily be amplified and strengthened with evidence, I am indebted to Dr. Torsten Petersson, of the University of California.

thing bodily from Thucydides — except the Pelasgicum and the Long Walls, where the victims of the earlier plague found shelter; there the difference ends; like the other, ‘it began in Ethiopia, whence it descended to Egypt,’ and to most of the Parthian empire, where it very discreetly remained” (chap. 15). He adds: “I left him engaged in burying the poor Athenians in Nisibis, and knew quite well how he would continue after my exit. Indeed, it is a pretty common belief at present that you are writing like Thucydides, if you just use his actual words *mutatis mutandis*.” (Translation by Fowler.)

This famous Attic plague, the *mortifer aestus* of Lucretius, is in the epigram very properly termed a *febris*. Grote speaks of it as “an eruptive typhoid fever, distinct from, yet analogous to, the smallpox.” Niebuhr thinks it was something like yellow fever; others regard it as a camp fever. Certainly the fever symptoms are the most conspicuous in Thucydides’ account. The first of these were the violent heats in the head, τῆς κεφαλῆς θερμαὶ ἰσχυραί, and the redness and inflammation of the eyes, τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἐρυθρήματα καὶ φλόγῳσις. There was the blood-red hue of the throat and tongue, and while the body was not very hot to the touch, yet the internal parts were so badly burned that sufferers could not bear the lightest covering, and would gladly throw themselves, if possible, into cold water. They were consumed with an unquenchable thirst, and usually died on the seventh or ninth day through the internal burning, ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐντὸς καύματος.

The whole account is a descriptive masterpiece, and the man who composed it may well be called the *tyrannus*, the lord or sovereign in this field, for in such a narrative he has no peer, but stands alone. But, it may be objected, is not *tyrannus* a term of disparagement or contempt, rather than of praise and cordial approval? I have examined Virgil’s use of the word, and find that, while it is commonly employed of an arbitrary, cruel, or hostile king, yet it may be used in a neutral and even friendly sense. It is applied to Pluto, Pygmalion, and Mezentius, but it is also used of Latinus merely as “king” (*Aen.* vii, 342), and of Aeneas himself



by the friendly Latinus (*ib.* 266). Ovid, too, calls Tereus a *clarus tyrannus*, simply a "famous prince" (*Met.* vi, 436), and in a somewhat similar way Horace makes Capricorn the *tyrannus Hesperiae undae* (*Carm.* ii, 17, 19), because to Capricorn was assigned the lordship of the western world, *tyrannus* being perfectly synonymous with *arbiter* in Horace's well-known *arbiter Hadriae* (*Carm.* i, 3, 15).<sup>3</sup>

But why should the epigrammatist have set Thucydides' account of the Attic plague in such high relief? Clearly there should be some connection in thought between the phrase *tyrannus Atticae febris* and the rest of the epigram. This, fortunately, is easy to find. Cimber had planned the murder of his brother. Where could he with more certainty learn of an unfailing *via mortis*, and where would he be more likely to procure the necessary ingredients for a deadly concoction of spells (*verba*)—compare

miscueruntque herbas et non innoxia verba

(*Georg.* iii, 283)

— than in the dispensary of that great contemporary of Hippocrates, the historian who made so careful a diagnosis of an extraordinarily fatal malady? If Cimber became a perfect Thucydides, he also became well versed in a fever that ruthlessly and almost inevitably swept away its victims.

The whole epigram, then, is an elaborate *double entendre*. Cimber loved archaic words and ancient spells. Being a perfect Thucydides, he not only lorded it over the disciples enslaved to his false and baneful Atticism, but, like his own great master, he understood better than all others a sure, though mysterious, *modus moriendi*; and as in his speeches he mangled and butchered for his pupils his uncouth sounds and old-fangled words, so for his brother he made a mess of all these outlandish elements, concocting such poisonous spells that his victim succumbed to their deadly effect.

<sup>3</sup> Professor H. C. Nutting has called my attention to the following passage in Nepos, *Milt.* 8: Omnes illos . . . annos . . . tyrannus . . . fuerat appellatus sed iustus; non erat enim vi consecutus, sed suorum voluntate; eamque potestatem bonitate retinebat. omnes autem et dicuntur et habentur tyranni, qui potestate sunt perpetua in ea civitate quae libertate usa est.